

STRAY NOTES ON PAPUAN ETHNOLOGY.

PART II. (*Continued from Vol. x. (2), p. 617*)BY C. HEDLEY, F.L.S., CONCHOLOGIST TO THE AUSTRALIAN
MUSEUM.

(Plates XIV.-XV.)

III. A PALU HOOK.

In a recent article on the Ethnology of Funafuti,* I have had occasion to review in detail from the Ellice, and in general from the Pacific, a gigantic wooden fish hook, commonly miscalled a shark hook.

The fish in whose capture it is employed is possibly a species unknown to naturalists, for the only description of it with which I am acquainted is an account, couched in popular language, by Mr. Louis Becke,† the well known writer of South Sea tales. This description suggests to my colleague Mr. E. R. Waite that it may be one of the family Macruridæ; it certainly is no shark.

The "Palu," as it is called in the Ellice, is a fish six feet in length and a hundred and fifty pounds in weight, shaped like an Australian Jewfish, with a tough black skin covered with large silvery curled scales, with large eyes and toothless (?) jaws. It lives on the sea floor at depths of from 80 to 100 fathoms.

On Nanomana palu fishing is conducted with superstition and ceremony. Strict silence is enjoined when fishing, the take is restricted to two by each canoe, and these are equally divided among everybody, a relic possibly of earlier communism.

* *Memoirs of the Australian Museum*, iii. 1897, The Atoll of Funafuti, p. 272, figs. 39, 40.

† *Mem. Aus. Mus. op. cit.* p. 199.

Under different forms the palu hook can be traced from the South Central Pacific, through the Gilberts and Marshalls to the Carolines. South and west of this there is but occasional evidence of its occurrence in the area inhabited by Melanesian races; an aberrant type has been figured from Fiji by Edge-Partington and another variation from the Louisiades by Macgillivray. Nearer than any, both in form and in geographical position, to that we are about to consider, is a specimen shown by Finsch from the Trobriands.* This, also without a barb, corresponds in size, in the hook which terminates the barb limb and in the other limb being of even thickness throughout.

The present hook (figs. 1, 2) was obtained by Mr. Norman Hardy, specimens from whose collection have so frequently been the subject of communication to this Society, and who has kindly entrusted it to me for description. He recently purchased it in Samarai, British New Guinea, from a trader who said that it came from Milne Bay.

This hook reached me unfortunately without the barb; it weighs a pound and a half, in total length it is nineteen inches, and in greatest breadth seven and a half. The two limbs are nearly square in section, of equal length, twelve inches, the elbow from which they branch is bulbous, especially in profile. The hook limb is much scratched half way down on its outer side by the gnawing of captured fishes; seven inches from the end the limb is cut down to a small shoulder, obsolete on the inner side; this certainly has reference to the length of the barb. The head of the barb-limb terminates in a chin directed towards the other limb and evidently intended to fit against the barb. As I have shown in discussing the subject elsewhere, local characteristics reside in the method of applying the barb to the shank. Though the barb itself is lacking and though I have no information relating to it, I have ventured to suggest its probable size and position by dotted lines in the accompanying illustration (fig. 1).

* Finsch, *Ethnological Atlas*, 1888, Pl. ix. f. 9.

The most bizarre feature of the hook and that which separates it the widest from its congeners is the loop for the attachment of the fishing line (fig. 2). To detach this is impossible without destroying much of the value of the specimen from an ethnological aspect, but I have ascertained by thrusting a pen-knife under the lashing that the limb holds it by no knobs or projections, but carries the same breadth to the end. The neatness and strength of the wicker lashing is characteristic of Papuan workmanship, and is like that used on adze heads. A wooden hoop, whose end is seen projecting in the drawing, is bent over the end of the limb and served round with a split cane (?) of a species unknown to me, leaving an eye two and three quarters by one and three quarter inches for the reception of the fishing line. This is cross-seized with cane at the end of the limb and again four inches lower down. This fastening cannot be moved or shaken by any force I could apply, and is apparently intended to resist and has resisted great strain in drawing weighty fish to the surface.*

IV. A WAIST BAND KNOT.

The most superficial of readers or of travellers in the Pacific cannot fail to possess some acquaintance with the garment known to Europeans as the "grass petticoat" and to Polynesians as the "titi." Throughout the Pacific it is the usual woman's dress, and may be generally described as a belt from which depend strips or bunches of fibre. It has long been known that between one island and another considerable difference exists in the local dresses in the way of material, length and colour.

In studying the dresses from Funafuti, I found that distinctions occurred also in the mode in which the strands are knotted to the waist belt. On this point I have met with no previous observations, and I therefore described and figured the Funafuti pattern in detail.

* *Postscript.*—Since the above was read, Mr. Hardy has generously presented this interesting specimen to the Australian Museum.

On dissecting the waist band of a New Guinea dress, I find another knot so different and so complicated that it also seems worthy of publication.⁴ Other knots have since come under my notice, and I can commend the subject to students as likely to repay careful investigation. A trifle like one of these knots might serve to trace migrations or affinities, for these would exclusively descend from woman to woman—there as elsewhere the most conservative element in the population. Every collection is well supplied with material, and these dresses are among the last of native fabrics to be obliterated by European civilisation.

The dress containing the knot to be described is a kind usual in East British New Guinea, dyed in alternate vertical stripes, with a scalloped flounce at a quarter depth. Inside (fig. 3) the belt shows the fibres as if in two beaded rows, outside (fig. 4) the fibres appear caught in a chain stitch. A glance at the exterior gives no idea of the intricate knot shown unravelled (fig. 5). Two bundles of fibres are disposed in a series of three. The waist band of the *titi* is always of two strings. Over the lower is hitched the two fibre bundles; then dividing they receive between them the fibres of the preceding series; closing again, they divide the succeeding pair; then passing over the top cord, they descend behind the second and third pairs, and opening out contribute to the skirt of the dress.

EXPLANATION OF PLATES.

Plate xiv.

Figs. 1 and 2.—Palu hook from front and side.

Plate xv.

Fig. 3.—Inside belt of *titi*.

Fig. 4.—Outside of same.

Fig. 5.—Knot unravelled.